

PREFACE

This Forest Plan is a guide for the overall management of *National Forests in Florida* for the next decade. This Forest Plan is not a list of projects; it is a framework for future decision making. You are invited to participate in planning, implementing, and monitoring projects that bring the Forest Plan to life.

The Forest Service Mission forms the basis by which all desired conditions can be met and program priorities maintained. Grounded in law and the principals of stewardship, the Forest Service Mission remains simple and succinct—"Caring for the Land and Serving People." In an expanded narrative, the Forest Service has identified nine aspects of its mission. Those aspects are summarized as:

1. Advocating a conservation ethic in promoting the health, productivity, diversity, and beauty of forests and associated lands.
2. Listening to people and responding to their diverse needs in making decisions.
3. Protecting and managing the national forests and grasslands so they best demonstrate the sustainable multiple-use management concept.
4. Providing technical and financial assistance to State and private forest landowners, encouraging them to practice good stewardship and quality land management in meeting their specific objectives.
5. Providing technical and financial assistance to cities and communities to improve their natural environment by planting trees and caring for their forests.
6. Providing international technical assistance and scientific exchanges to sustain and enhance global resources and to encourage quality land management.
7. Helping states and communities to wisely use the forests to promote rural economic development and a quality rural environment.
8. Developing and providing scientific and technical knowledge aimed at improving our capability to protect, manage, and use forests and rangelands.
9. Providing work, training, and education to the unemployed, underemployed, elderly, youth, and disadvantaged in pursuit of our mission.

This Forest Plan represents an adaptive approach to national forest management. By this we mean that we do not know it all. We must make assumptions based on the latest scientific research, what people are telling us is possible, and what people value. We must be flexible, capable of adapting new methods and processes where they are needed. As we implement this Forest Plan, we will monitor results, compare them with our assumptions, and make adaptations where necessary.

The 1990s is a profound period of change for the Forest Service. In addition to dealing with declining budgets and organizational reinvention, program emphasis has shifted to ecosystem health and sustainability. Human values are changing. People are more concerned about the environment and the places that are meaningful to them. Recycling has become routine. Volunteerism in conservation programs is at an all-time high. Such changes in human behavior reflect a growing interest in protecting the environment. With Florida's rapidly-growing population, our ability to sustain resources that provide for people's needs and values will continue to be a challenge.

Three of the national forests—the Apalachicola, Ocala and Osceola—contain 1.1 million acres with some of the State of Florida's largest remaining longleaf pine and sand pine/scrub ecosystems. On these national forests, an ecological approach is used to achieve multiple-use management by blending the needs of people and environmental values to ensure that forest ecosystems are diverse, healthy, productive, and sustainable.

Containing a magnificent variety of complex and beautiful ecosystems, the national forests in Florida stand as islands surrounded by an ocean of development. National forests and other key public lands and greenways in Florida represent a balance between natural processes and human influence where the diversity of species creates an environment that is constantly changing and renewing itself. Although interwoven with the broader environment, these *islands* also function as intact, unique ecosystems and biological refuges in a state that is experiencing rapid population growth and increased demands on remaining open space and natural areas. The Forest Service works in partnership with the other public agencies to provide good stewardship for these important land and natural resource values.

In 1994, the *Florida Greenways Commission - Report to the Governor* identified six ecological hubs in the state, three of which involve national forests. The desire is to use these hubs, through public/private sector partnerships, to create a statewide system of greenways. The Forest Service also is committed to work in partnership with the State of Florida in the Ocklawaha River Restoration Project. Additionally, the Forest Service has the management responsibility for the proposed 1,300-mile Florida National Scenic Trail, which connects all six hubs and many other greenways.

In 1995, the State legislature created a 26-member Florida Greenways Coordinating Council to develop a report by 1999 for managing the Florida greenways system. Of the 26 members, the Forest Service was selected by the Governor to represent the Federal entities in Florida. Federal ownership comprises more than half of the public land in Florida and 16 percent of the total land base in Florida.

Profile of National Forests in Florida

Apalachicola National Forest (NF) is a large area of public forestland in Florida's ``panhandle." It is adjacent to the city of Tallahassee. This forest is characterized by vast flatwoods and sandhills of longleaf, slash, and loblolly pine forests; and it is home to the largest known population of the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. These fire-dependent ecosystems are maintained by the largest prescribed burning program on national forests in the nation. The landscape is threaded by bay, cypress, and titi swamps, seepage bogs, and open savannahs rich with endemic plant species. The Apalachicola River borders the forest to the west; and the scenic Ochlockonee, Sopchoppy, and New Rivers meander through the forest on their journey to the Gulf of Mexico. The underlying geology provides numerous sinkholes and one of the longest known underground water cavern systems in the world.

Special attributes found on the forest are the Apalachee Savannahs Scenic Byway, Trout Pond Recreation Area (specifically designed to accommodate persons with disabilities), Munson Hills Off-Road Bicycle Trail (the first trail in the Southern Region designed specifically for mountain bikes), Florida National Scenic Trail (its longest stretch extends through wilderness on this forest), and a municipal airport within the forest boundary. Uses of the forest range from timber harvesting to worm ``grunting" to tupelo honey production.

Choctawhatchee National Forest was established in 1908 and managed by the Forest Service until 1940, when all lands were transferred to the War Department. Most of this land is now Eglin Air Force Base. Land may be restored to national forest status when it is no longer needed for military purposes. About 1,100 acres have been transferred to the Forest Service. Most of this land is under special-use permit to State and county governments. This forest is administered by the Apalachicola Ranger District.

Ocala National Forest, the oldest national forest east of the Mississippi River within the continental United States, is noted for its sand pine scrub ecosystem. The rolling hills contain the largest concentration of sand pine in the world. Growing on deep, prehistoric sand dunes, the sand pine scrub is home to the threatened Florida scrub-jay, sand skink, and Florida bonamia plant. Within this sea of sand pine, longleaf pine islands provide a different view with open, parklike stands of trees over grassy plains. Wildlife species of interest include the bald eagle, Florida black bear, Florida manatee, gopher tortoise, indigo snake, and red-cockaded woodpecker.

The forest's porous sands and largely undeveloped character provide an important recharge for the Floridan aquifer. Freshwater springs produce several hundred million gallons of water each day. Crystal clear springs, pothole marshes, and sinkhole lakes provide year-round recreational opportunities and unique aquatic habitats. A subtropical environment and a location near Disney World make the Ocala NF a popular destination for thousands of visitors from the United States and abroad.

Osceola National Forest is a mosaic of low pine ridges separated by cypress and bay swamps. Located near the crossroads of I-10 and I-75, this forest is within an hour's drive of more than one million people. The local population, as well as the residents of Jacksonville and Gainesville, enjoys the recreation that centers around Ocean Pond, a shallow, natural lake. Facilities are available for boating, camping, picnicking, and swimming. A 22-mile segment of the Florida National Scenic Trail passes through the Osceola NF, with many boardwalk sections traversing gum swamps and cypress ponds. The Big Gum Swamp Wilderness provides 13,500 acres in which visitors can enjoy a challenging, natural setting.

History plays an important role on the Osceola NF. The historic Olustee Depot and the Trampled Track interpretive trail give a glimpse at the rich history of the forest. Remnants of old railroad grades, used to move logs to sawmills, crisscross the forest. Osceola NF has been known for its ability to produce high-quality timber. Olustee Experimental Forest was established in the 1930s to provide research for the naval stores industry. Trees across the forest were tapped for resin, and remnants of old turpentine camps can be found in the forest. The annual reenactment of the Battle of Olustee, the largest Civil War battle fought in Florida, attracts thousands of visitors each February to the Olustee Battlefield.

The northern portion of the forest is characterized by Pinhook Swamp and Impassable Bay. These wetland ecosystems link the forest to Okefenokee Swamp and form the headwaters of the Suwannee River and St. Mary's River. The area provides important habitat for many plants and animals and is a potential reintroduction site for Florida panthers.



National Forests and Other Public Lands in Florida

